



# Criminal Justice Knowledge Bank

An initiative of the Division of Criminal Justice Services



## Monroe County: Rochester Threat Advisory Committee

**Practitioner:**  
[Monroe County Sheriff's Office](#)

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**Summary:**  
The Rochester Threat Advisory Committee represents a consortium of stakeholders with diverse expertise and access to resources dedicated to preventing targeted acts of violence.

### Problem

Targeted violence refers to willful, predatory crimes focused on a specific individual(s) or groups, and usually based on real or perceived grievances. Responses to targeted violence are often reactive, disparate and fragmented. Following a Monroe County murder-suicide, local law enforcement recognized the need for a threat assessment and management team, which aims to identify and assess violent threats, intervene when necessary, and provide assistance to those in need.

The team includes various law enforcement agencies, government agencies, social service agencies, non-profits, private sector partners, and other stakeholders. The committee discusses cases of potential threats that are identified by a law enforcement agency or other organizations in the county. It aims to systematically examine multiple sources of information about threats of violence, offer best practices and resources for mitigating or managing the threat, and make recommendations to the presenting agency about how to manage persons who pose a real concern for an incident of planned, targeted violence, both domestic and nondomestic. Taking preventive measures to recognize and address risk factors and warning signs provides law enforcement the opportunity to potentially defuse a violent situation or individual, with an

emphasis on restorative measures.

### Program Description

In 2018, the Monroe County Sheriff's Office collaborated with several local law enforcement agencies and other stakeholders to establish the [Rochester Threat Advisory Committee](#). The committee was developed with the support and guidance of the [Justice and Security Institute](#) at Roberts Wesleyan College and was based on Marion County, Oregon's [Threat Advisory Team](#).

The committee has members from 28 local and federal entities, including the Monroe County Department of Public Safety, Monroe County District Attorney's Office, U.S. Attorney's Office and the FBI; other government agencies and nonprofits, such as the Monroe County Office of Mental Health, domestic violence and other service providers; and businesses, school districts and universities. The committee has a coordinator and manager to split the duties of scheduling, coordinating, running meetings and training. Representatives from participating member agencies meet twice a month to review cases, with additional meetings scheduled as needed for more time sensitive cases. The goal is to increase communication and cooperation among agencies, share perspectives, resources and strategies, and reduce gaps caused by systems

*An initiative of the state Division of Criminal Justice Services, the Knowledge Bank features summaries of promising local programs and practices and provides a platform for criminal justice practitioners to identify potential approaches to address their community's specific public safety issue.*

delays and agency silos. In the event an individual exhibits behavior with a high probability of violence, lines of communication are open between agencies and resources available for intervention.

The committee develops case management strategies when an individual's potential for self-harm and/or violence to others is considered significant by the presenting agency. No specific tool is used to assess potential for violence. Rather, identification may be based on a review of:

- risk factors (e.g., exhibiting unstable or erratic behaviors, history of violence or suicidal ideation, physical or emotional isolation, etc.); or
- warning behaviors commonly associated with targeted violence (e.g., obtaining weapons, stalking, communicating to others intent to do harm, etc.).

Any community organization or participating member agency can present a case to the committee using a guide provided by the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Team (BAT) which includes open-ended questions designed to present the circumstances and information needed to develop a management plan. It does not predict future violence or risk of harm to self or others. The presenting agency thoroughly details the circumstances and situational factors surrounding the potential threat. The committee coordinator or manager reviews the threat assessment to ensure the concerns rise to the level of the committee. Since there is no quantifiable threat level associated with the form, each threat is considered on a case-by-case basis. The committee hears the initial presentation by the presenting agency, makes recommendations for intervention and case management strategies, and offers committee resources. The presenting agency maintains full responsibility for the case. The committee's recommendations are not binding.

The committee recommends the least intrusive intervention based on known risk factors, severity of the threat, and the spectrum of available intervention options. For example, a least intrusive option may involve the committee establishing a trusted point of contact for the individual who will contact authorities if the situation escalates. For a higher level of intervention, the committee may coordinate care among participating agencies, such as attending Mental Health Court proceedings or notifying a school district about a student's parent's behavior. Other high-level interventions may include court proceedings, such as confiscating firearms under the state's [Red Flag Law](#).

If a presenting case is domestic violence-related, additional steps are taken to ensure victim safety by working with committee members from the primary police agency and the domestic violence advocacy agency. The committee ensures the existence of a victim safety plan, reviews any order of protection issues, and provides guidance on connection of services. As with all threat cases, additional best practices, support and resources are offered as needed to provide a holistic approach to the case, including but not limited to assistance from Monroe County Child Protective Services, Office of Mental Health, or Family Court.

The committee attempts to balance the safety needs of the public or known victim with the health and wellness needs of the individual deemed to be a risk. The committee does not focus on punitive measures (e.g., arrest), but instead creates and plans restorative measures to mitigate or resolve the problem. Threat cases are discussed at bi-weekly meetings. Threats of targeted violence are dynamic, and periodic reassessment is a vital aspect of managing threat cases. The presenting agency determines when the case will no longer be discussed because the threat is mitigated or resolved.

Committee members participate in initial and annual threat assessment and management training provided by Certified Threat Managers from various agencies, including federal government agencies, New York State Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, and private sector companies which utilize instructors certified by the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals. Executive management from the participating member agencies meet quarterly to assess and strategize improvements for the committee.

As of August 2022, the committee reviewed 43 cases. Virtual meetings occurred so the committee could adhere to social distancing and other requirements necessary because of the COVID-19 pandemic and continue as an option to present day.

## Funding

Creation of the Rochester Threat Assessment Committee occurred without designated funding. A [Certified Threat Manager](#) from the Justice and Security Institute volunteered time to assist in its development. The state Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES) awarded the Monroe County Sheriff's Office a grant in 2021 to hire a program manager, and

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provide funding for training, marketing, and presentations.

## Supportive Research

Foundational studies such as the [Exceptional Case Study Project](#) and the [Safe School Initiative](#) focused on the thinking and behavior of targeted violence offenders leading up to their crimes. In most targeted acts of violence, the offender did not necessarily threaten the victims directly, but displayed identifiable behaviors leading up to the violent crime indicating intent. It is generally agreed that a person intending to engage in violence follows a [pathway of intended violence](#), where the progression, speed and steps may vary. [Research](#) supports using an approach to assess threat and identify a management process using strategies to prevent targeted violence.

## Critical Success Factors

- Generate awareness across stakeholders about the availability of best practices to mitigate the risk of targeted violence in a community. Efforts to raise awareness through training and presentations helped achieve broad cross-system buy-in and engage member participation.
- Execute a memorandum of understanding (MOU), which includes committee rules, processes and member expectations, among all participating agencies. This MOU helps ensure that agencies are comfortable with the parameters set by the committee and that agencies continue to abide by their practices, rules and regulations and state or federal laws. For example, agencies bound by HIPAA do not disclose confidential information.
- Respect the expertise of participating committee members, which leads to productive collaboration and identification of potential solutions to mitigate a potentially violent situation.

## Lessons Learned

- In some cases, smaller meetings may occur with appropriate members (e.g., only sworn law enforcement members). There are circumstances where members are unable to speak freely in front of

the full committee while adhering to agency rules and regulations.

- Given the high-ranking positions of the committee members, keeping meetings short and well-organized is essential. Meetings last for one hour, and members have found that presenting information on no more than two cases per meeting helps ensure meetings end on time.
- The Monroe County Sheriff's Office hired a coordinator and consultant manager to coordinate, schedule and lead meetings, follow-up on cases, and deliver trainings or presentations. The manager also promotes the services the committee offers to local businesses and non-profits. This work had previously been done by a committee member who had volunteered his time. Additionally, a deputy from Monroe County Sheriff's Office has been assigned on a part-time basis for case-related action items and follow up.
- To increase community awareness, the committee began promoting its work through a new [website](#) and by providing in-person and virtual presentations. Utilizing strategic social media will be the next phase of marketing.

## Additional Comments

- In addition to funding the manager in Monroe County, DHSES funded new threat assessment committees in Erie and Niagara counties. DHSES provided training to these new committees and the Monroe County Sheriff's Office served as a resource for the new sites.
- The committee does not take control of cases involving a person of concern, but rather offers advice, guidance, and resources for the presenting agency to manage the person of concern. The presenting agency is not bound to abide by those suggestions.
- Following the May 2022 Buffalo mass shooting, the Governor issued [Executive Order 18](#) requiring all counties to develop and maintain their own plan to identify and address domestic terrorism threats, including input from law enforcement, school officials, mental health professionals and other stakeholders. The Rochester Threat Advisory Committee model may be a helpful reference in plan development.

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